

Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* (1666), Early Modern  
Feminism, and Female Friendships

Research Thesis

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Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), was educated in areas fit for ladies; however, it was during the Civil War when she truly blossomed. As a Royalist, Cavendish was forced from England to France as an attendant to Queen Henrietta Maria. While in exile, Cavendish met her husband—William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle. Cavendish garnered much attention from contemporaries; many women described her as “eccentric” in the ways she acted outside of the societal norms for ladies. In a letter to her husband, Mary Evelyn—wife to a founding member of the Royal Society—writes, “At last I grew weary and concluded that the creature [Margaret Cavendish] called a chimera which I had heard speak of, was now to be seen, and that it was time to retire for fear of infection; yet I hope, as she is an original, she may never have a copy. Never did I see a woman so full of herself, so amazingly vain and ambitious” (92). An extraordinary woman who was not afraid to stand up to authority for what was right, Margaret Cavendish’s life was filled with adventure and friendships that must be explored.

Female friendships, real and furtive, of the early modern period provide an avenue into understanding the reality for women writers and how women grappled with power in a society against them. Many male writers, like their medieval counterparts, praised male friendships but demeaned female friendships. These men deemed women unfit for any agency in their world. Nevertheless, the publication of Margaret Cavendish’s utopian novel *The Blazing World* in 1666 defied these male voices. Through the development of two female characters in roles that would have been typically male-oriented and by empowering the two characters, Cavendish rejects the male voices of the time period and

presents a reality for women in the time period: women could handle friendships with other women, and women could find power within those friendships.

Previous work on *The Blazing World* has focused on the text's scientific and utopian aspects. *The Blazing World* was published at the beginning of the Enlightenment movement, a time of scientific growth. When Cavendish published *The Blazing World*, she appended it to her book *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, a nonfiction exploration of natural philosophy. In *Observations*, Cavendish explores various ideas on natural philosophy along with her experiences with the Royal Society during her visit in 1667 (Bell, Parfitt & Shepherd 43). The second part of the publication—*The Blazing World*—is fiction. In the “To the Reader,” Cavendish explains that “by reason most Ladies take no delight in Philosophical Arguments, I separated some from the mentioned Observations, and caused them to go out by themselves, that I might express my Respects, in presenting to Them such Fancies as my Contemplations did afford. The First Part is Romancical; the Second, Philosophical; and the Third is meerly Fancy; or (as I may call it) Fantastical” (sig. A3v). It is Cavendish's hope that her ideas on natural philosophy can spread further through this work of fiction and influence a female readership, as she addressed this part to “all Noble and Worthy Ladies.” Furthermore, Cavendish explains that most women, unlike herself, do not enjoy “Philosophical Arguments.” Cavendish works a multitude of arguments into her story that, if plainly revealed, might not have interested her female readership in the way that she wanted. Cavendish, therefore, hoped to influence women readers into joining her in the pursuit of knowledge. Cavendish hoped to build a society out of the readership—a society of women helping women and adding to scientific discourse in an inclusive manner.

The development of her utopia is cause for much investigation. Scholars such as Marina Leslie, Lee Cullen Khana, and Rachel Trubowitz have discussed the work in terms of the utopian genre and whether and how much Cavendish breaks away from the genre and if so, how much she actually does. Rachel Trubowitz describes the utopian genre by writing, "For most students of the genre, the utopia celebrates the attempt to rationalize human culture. [J.C. Davis] describes the utopia as 'distinguished by its pursuit of legal, institutional, bureaucratic and educational means of producing a harmonious society'; for James Holstun, the utopia is 'the experimental site for the formation of a new cultural order... a human organization of space that will follow from human reason'" (qtd. in Trubowitz 230). In Cavendish's work, readers see the development of an absolute monarchy with a woman given absolute control by her husband. Moreover, readers see a friendship emerge between two main female characters that establishes power in areas that are not seen in English society. The readers are presented with a harmonious society in the *Blazing World*, especially with the Empress at the helm.<sup>1</sup> Cavendish is making a statement about women's agency in politics, and she equally is speaking on behalf of female friendships and the power women find in them.

Cavendish's *The Blazing World* is the story of a woman who is kidnapped because of her beauty. The men who kidnap her take her to the North Pole, and while they die from the extreme cold, the Lady survives and finds a portal through to a new world titled the "Blazing World." In a world populated by many species from Bear Men to Worm Men, these

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<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the particulars of the story are what attract scholars to theorize about the reasons behind it. Scholars are especially intrigued by the ways in which Cavendish references her contemporaries, and scholars attempt to understand her use in the ways that the Empress moves throughout the *Blazing World*; through the Empress' every move, scholars are still debating whether she is aligned with her contemporaries for the tropes of the utopian genre or whether she is defying the tropes set by the male contemporaries.

men present the Lady to the Emperor, who immediately wishes to marry her because of her beauty. After marriage, the Empress is given absolute rule over the kingdom, and she focuses that power first on scientific discovery. After she is satisfied with the original findings of the scientists, the Empress decides she must speak with spirits to create a Cabbala. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a Cabbala has a two-fold definition; the first definition is “The name given in post-biblical Hebrew to the oral tradition handed down from Moses to the Rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud” while the second definition is “Towards the beginning of the thirteenth cent. a.d. applied to the pretended tradition of the mystical interpretation of the Old Testament” (“Cabbala | Kabbalah, n”). The mysticism applied to the Cabbala makes concept itself a risky idea; in early modern England, if the Cabbala went too far into mysticism, it could have been labeled as heresy. The spirits, meanwhile, suggest the Duchess of Newcastle (Margaret Cavendish) as the perfect spirit to aide her. At this point, the friendship between the Duchess and the Empress becomes the forefront of the story, and their friendship ultimately is what helps end a war. What makes this work so intriguing, however, is the focus placed upon the women and their roles within the story. Their roles within this utopia ultimately depart from what many male voices presented as “ideal women” for the time period; on top of that, the utopian genre presents the idea that Cavendish wished for women to be in positions of power, especially within politics, and that women’s power could grow through their friendships with one another.

The importance of friendship and female collaboration is illustrated in Cavendish’s own life. In order to publish her manuscripts, Cavendish and other writers had to rely on printers. Printing itself became a popular business, and during the time of the publication

of *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, female printers were becoming more common. Many women were widows who inherited the trade upon their husband's death, although many women were invisible from official records. In the appendix, *A Biographical Dictionary of English Women Writers 1580-1720* writes,

Reliance on the records of the Stationers' Company, the 'official' face of book trade history, is misleading: women were excluded from position and power within the Company, and it is usually the names of the male members of book trade families which appear in Company records. The Company did, however, concede a number of valuable rights to women: stationers' widows, for example, were allowed to bind apprentices and to hold shares in the Company's copyright monopoly, the English Stock... Throughout the century women are found entering copies in the Stationers' Register; taking, transferring and freeing apprentices; being investigated, harassed, fined and imprisoned by the authorities for illegal or 'seditious' activities; and entering into trade partnerships. The chaos in the book trade during and after the Civil War benefited women as well as men printers, publishers and booksellers, and of the 300 or so women identified as connected with the trade during our period, most were active after 1640. (288)

Women began to appear more rapidly in the printing industry in the late 1660s, increasing their visibility and power to influence popular opinion. *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* was published in 1666 and then republished in 1668. That means that Anne Maxwell, the printer for *Observations* and all of Cavendish's later work, became a printer in a time when women themselves were gaining more apparent opportunities in the business.

The work relationship that must have existed between Cavendish and Anne Maxwell offer more insight towards the way that women operated.

While their companionship presents new ideas that must be explored, the world Cavendish wrote in was also an interesting time. As a result of the beginning of the Enlightenment, logic and scientific thought became the popular mode of presenting new ideas. Adding something to the scientific community was a valued activity among the elite, and Cavendish wanted to participate in this community. One of the goals of the Enlightenment was social progress and rational reform of society. Thus the period's genres inspired hopefulness; the idea of social harmony and how to achieve that was something to strive for. Utopias offered readers those worlds, and while certain tropes were established in the genre of the work, Cavendish herself defied those tropes to further her own ideas. Cavendish's story presents an inclusive society driven by women that defies the ideals presented in conduct manuals, and her story presents a bigger scale to the reality of women and friendships. *The Blazing World* can be understood as a declaration for women and power.

### **Genre and *The Blazing World***

The utopian genre, much like conduct books of the time period, aimed to present ideas for how society should progress. Therefore, Cavendish's utopian society has intrigued scholars. Rachel Trubowitz writes, "... Cavendish's complex engagement with the utopian paradigm in *Blazing World* results in a revision of the utopian genre that is at once culturally subversive and politically nostalgic and, as such, uniquely accommodates her construction of female subjectivity in imperial terms" (229-230). Trubowitz argues that Cavendish's departure from the utopian genre reflects back on political viewpoints such as

absolutism while embracing feminism. Other scholars approach Cavendish's departure from the tropes of the utopian genre differently. Lee Cullen Khanna focuses on how Cavendish defies the utopian genre through its depictions of women in various powerful positions:

[T]he point at which genre and gender intersect in the representation of utopian desire is in the locus of discursive authority. When Socrates and Thrasmyachus debate the nature of justice, or Thomas More and Raphael Hytholoday argue about the role of philosophy in political practice, the ideal social orders that emerge in the text differ dramatically from those arising from the conversation of the Empress of the *Blazing-World* and 'Honest Margaret Newcastle'... (15)

By introducing an inclusive society that embraces gender equally, Cavendish completely alters utopian norms. Cavendish's utopia has gender at the center by including a woman like the Empress with extensive power. This idea is especially important in the context of female friendships. As something that was looked down upon contemporary male writers, the fact that the Empress and Duchess form a bond that has enough power to end a war back in the Empress' home world is important. This friendship leads to an inclusive society that rejects the exclusivity that was apparent in a patriarchal world.

Although Khanna argues that Cavendish's inclusive society breaks from the genre, others argue against the idea. Marina Leslie argues that although Cavendish alters the utopian tropes through her work, she also "seeks inclusion in male literary and philosophical canons, and in order to gain recognition she must also be to some degree recognizable within such canons" (7). Cavendish, in Leslie's argument, seeks the approval



from such male voices as much as she fights against those voices. Leslie presents some explicit examples—such as the use of the romantic genre and the way in which her work reflects Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; and the way her title and story placement reflects Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*—to show how Cavendish dabbles in tropes established by other male writers while also breaking from them. According to Leslie, the use of the utopia genre is so loosely defined; therefore, her work is not anymore outside of the norm for the genre than any other work:

Renaissance utopias draw on a variety of literary, historical, theological and philosophical forms, including, but not limited to: saturnalia, travelogue, Platonic dialogue, natural philosophy, and 'historical' accounts of a secular golden age or a sacred paradise... Utopian fiction has remained remarkably unconstrained by a fixed set of formal features. Moreover, insofar as it is the custom of utopian narratives to reject or transform their literary precursors, Cavendish is nowhere more orthodox a utopian than in her revisions of others' utopian models. (7)

Leslie's base argument does follow *The Blazing World*, and it is easy to see how the work matches up with the norms that she is describing. *The Blazing World* is a world that is like a sacred paradise, and it does look critically at natural philosophy. Cavendish's need to be accepted by the male writers of the genre, according to Leslie, is striking though. Despite Leslie's argument, Cavendish's references to other male contemporaries can also be interpreted in another way; like Khanna argues, she references male contemporaries as a way to deviate from the form and show that she is different from other contemporaries.

After all, in order for one to deviate from a genre, one must understand the genre in which they are writing.

Leslie's article does provide strong evidence for Cavendish's use of the utopia genre in her work. However, like Khanna argues, the importance placed upon gender in Cavendish's work cannot be ignored. While it is deemed important that Cavendish is referencing other male writers' works throughout the story, it could simply be a reference or even be attempts at parody. Elizabeth Scott-Baumann gives an example. In her article, she references the animal men in *The Blazing World*. She says that the animal men depicted in the Blazing World are in fact parodies of men Cavendish met while visiting the Royal Society (67). By parodying the men from the Royal Society in her work, Cavendish critiques the men for their exclusion of women and their scientific approaches. Although she had been invited into the male-exclusive society, science was still very excluded from women. Therefore, it stands to reason that Cavendish must have disagreed with how exclusive the Royal Society was and how adverse they were to women's ideas. If Cavendish can parody men in the Royal Society in such a significant way, then it is also possible that the references that Leslie is pointing out are also parodies. On top of that, Cavendish could have been using those parodies to further distance herself away from her male contemporaries.

One of the male "contemporaries" that Leslie argues Cavendish references is Shakespeare. For the comparison of Shakespeare to Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, Leslie writes, "[They] similarly begin with a thwarted rape and a tempest... [I]n both texts the female role is central to political consolidation in the new world and the possibility of restoration in the old world. Cavendish's boldest revision is simply to make the woman the agent as well as the instrument of these processes" (13). Leslie argues that the difference is

the fact that the female characters are given more agency than in *The Tempest*; however, this still deviates from the norm. The friendships between the Empress and the Duchess reinforces women's agency. With several female characters at the forefront of this novel, it is clear that Cavendish is making a positive statement for the agency of women. The Empress, after her husband gifts it to her, rules the kingdom on her own. She decides how her people can better the community, and she decides how to enter a war. She must also deal with any consequences her action brings; however, as it is in a utopia, the consequences are not dire as those in reality. In fact, when the Empress changes something in the society for the better, her people rejoice. Her friendship with the Duchess grows in a positive manner as they both help further the development of her utopia. According to Khanna, "... [T]his text establishes permeability and creativity as textual strategies for empowerment. The principle of permeability blurs those very categories taken as normative in dominant discourse... [T]his technique works to transgress borders often used to exclude women and eliminate difference. Additionally, the representation of creativity in Cavendish's text empowers female characters and gestures toward the potential agency of readers as well" (24). The use of female friendships gives the women agency that is not available in texts written by men. This is made clear in the text when the Empress relies on the Duchess for counsel. The narrator says, "Then the Empress declared to her the grievance and sadness of her mind, and how much she was troubled and afflicted at the News brought her by the Immaterial Spirits, desiring the Duchess, if possible, to assist her with the best counsels she could, that she might shew the greatness of her love and affection which she bore to her Native Countrey" (232). The Empress must decide alone—does she invade and stop the war from happening or not—and the agency she uses

in this situation is significant; she does not merely ask for her husband's advice as the conduct manuals written by men teach, but she waits for the Duchess to help counsel her. Their friendship is given just as much importance as her marriage, and that power must be realized.

The primacy of the Duchess' advice can also be seen in another scene. After the war is finished and the Empress is headed back to the Blazing World, she and the Emperor discuss with the Duchess building a theater that would house the plays the Duchess writes. The discussion of art in this part, Khanna argues, reflects another inclusion that is not often seen in utopias. Khanna writes, "This attention to the artist, the embrace of the imaginative principle in establishing positive societies, sounds a striking new note in the utopian genre at this point in its history. The fear of the artist pervasive in dominant utopian thought is tied to a perceived threat to social order, truth, and discipline. Women's utopian fiction, on the other hand, may empower the imaginative principle for the same dangerous reason" (28-9). This is important because of the suggestion of what Cavendish—and other female writers of utopian fiction—have to work against. While male utopian writers fear the "artist" persona because of the disruptive ideas, female utopian writers embrace those artists for the same reason. Female utopian writers like Cavendish embrace inclusion because of what they faced in early modern society. Most female writers wrote under pseudonyms or even published anonymously. The fact that Cavendish published her works and had her name attached to her works was courageous.

The ways in which Cavendish developed her utopia breaks with the tropes for the genre at the time, and those breaks allow for more inclusion in ways that include the Empress' relationship with the Duchess. Their friendship brings an amount of power that

male writers would have feared, and Cavendish plays with that power deliberately. Not only is she breaking away from the genre itself, but Cavendish is also breaking away from what male writers in other genres depicted as guidelines for upstanding women. In genres like conduct books, male writers ruled that women's positions did not give enough power to have female friendships, especially once married.

### **The Male Voice the Depictions of Women**

The female protagonists are at the forefront of *The Blazing World*, and although there are male characters—such as their husbands—they are not fully placed in a position to subjugate the women back into “proper” place. This is in contrast to the ideals set forth in contemporary conduct manuals. As Cavendish knowingly breaks from the utopian tradition, it is plausible that Cavendish does so to highlight and critique contemporary expectations and roles of women.

Although the ideal marriage was companionate, it was meant to still be hierarchal. In his conduct book *A Preparative to Marriage* (1591), Henry Smith refers to the creation of Eve for an example of how a hierarchal marriage is meant to work. The narrator says, “To honour Mariage more yet, or rather to teach the married how to honour one another, it is saide, that the wife was made of the husbands rib: not of his head, for *Paule* calleth the husbände the wiues head: nor of the foote, for he must not set her at his foote: the seruante is appoynted to serue, and the wife to helpe” (sig. B4r). The narrator reminds the reader that in marriage, the man is supposed to be the head, and the woman is the neck to the husband's head. This is meant to further strengthen the subjugation women were supposed to accept. They are not servants because the rib from Adam came from his side and not a foot; therefore, a woman is not equal to her husband, but she is more than just a servant.

While this is the case, the conduct book does hint at a companionate marriage; by saying that wives are meant to “help” their husbands, it is implying that they must work together in order to succeed. In addition, he says, “He must set her at his heart, and therefore she which should lie in his bosome, was made in his bosome, and should bee as close to him as his ribb of which she was fashioned” (sig. B4r). On the one hand, the idea of the wife being in the husband’s heart sounds endearing. Nevertheless, the position the conduct book places the women in still presents a hierarchal marriage. When compared with *The Blazing World*, readers see that a wife does not need to be kept at a husband’s side in order for her to be in her husband’s heart.

The preface of *The Blazing World* offers an interesting defense against hierarchal marriage. In the preface, Cavendish’s husband, William Cavendish, wrote a poem. In the poem, he praises Margaret Cavendish for her development of the Blazing World when he says, “But your creating Fancy, thought it fit / to make your World of Nothing, but pure Wit. / Your *blazing-world*, beyond the Stars mounts higher, / enlightens all with a Coelestial Fier” (l. 9-12). While praising Cavendish’s creation, he also describes the Blazing World as a creation that surpasses all of the previous utopias. It presents the idea that William Cavendish embraced the writing of *The Blazing World*, and on top of that, it presents an idea that their marriage was one of equality. He respected his wife’s endeavors, and he perceived her work to be of great merit. The marriages in *The Blazing World* also remind viewers of positive marriages built on a foundation of communication and equality. Instead of relegating to a role underneath the Emperor, he gives the Lady “an absolute power to rule and govern all that World as she pleased” (162). With this short line, the narrator is making sure the readers understand that this marriage is not going to be the like those

Henry Smith describes. This new world that Cavendish has created allows women to govern in their own right, which places the Empress equal to the Emperor. It is also imperative to remember that the Emperor is the one who gives the Empress the power in the first place. The Lady, and later Empress, is given absolute rule over her kingdom, but it does not come from her inheriting it. After she marries the Emperor, he grants her this power. It is still up to the husband to give his wife what power he deems. Nevertheless, this marriage is still radically different from society's ideal.

The modern marriages within *The Blazing World* can also be seen in the little interactions between the Duchess and the Duke. The Duchess leaves her husband for months at a time in order to properly aide the Empress. When the Duke does appear in the book, it is to show how loving he is towards the Duchess. When the Empress first meets the Duke, the narrator describes, "... the Duke came out of the House into the Court... when the Duchess's soul perceived, she was so overjoyed, that her aerial Vehicle became so splendidous, as if it had been enlightened by the Sun; by which we may perceive, that the passions of Souls or Spirits can alter their bodily Vehicles" (222). These two clearly have a healthy relationship. The Duchess adores her husband, and when he does speak, it is to praise the Duchess and the Empress. While it is important to see the embrace of inclusion here—the Duchess and the Duke love one another so much that they can embrace the addition of the Empress as a close friend of the Duchess'—it is also important to remember that the Duchess is a fictional representation of Cavendish herself. This means that Cavendish's relationship in real life must have reflected the fictional representation of the Duchess and the Duke, and that means that Cavendish embraced inclusion within her home.

Cavendish's world also helps readers to see a society that has advanced. Henry Smith's sermon-turned-conduct book was published in 1591. Smith's conduct book suggests that although a husband and wife are meant to be in a companionate marriage of sorts, the marriage inevitably goes back to patriarchal values. In fact, Smith's description of a woman being the weaker vessel suggests that a husband should merely placate a wife's whims because she could not handle what comes with true responsibility. In the conduct book, he states, "To shew how he should tender her, *Peter saith, Honour the woman as the weaker vessell*. As we doo not handle glasses like pots, because they are weaker vessels, but touch the[m] nicely and softly for feare of cracks; so a man must intreate his wife with gentlenes and softnes; not expecting that wisdom, nor that faith, nor that patience, nor that strength in the weaker vessell, which should be in the stronger" (sig. F1r). The narrator expresses, then, the idea that a woman could not do something like hold absolute control over a world. His conduct book ultimately gives the impression that society in 1591 England would still look down upon a woman in power, despite the fact that Elizabeth I ruled the country, and Elizabeth I is known for twisting rhetoric involving her gender to favor her in any situation. In a speech given to the troops at Tilbury in 1588, Elizabeth I is quoted saying, "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too" (762-63). Elizabeth I knew what people believed about women, and she also knew that she needed to placate any fears that she was unfit to rule. Therefore, when she says that she has a "weak and feeble" female body but has "the heart and stomach of a king," she is saying that while yes, she is female, inside she is a king and therefore above the rules placed on other women. Some scholars have also argued for a parallel between Elizabeth I and the Empress herself. When the



Empress is presented to the warring countries of her homeland during the second part of the story, the description of her military garb has been compared to Elizabeth I's own garb during her Tilbury speech. Rachel Trubowitz writes, "In detailing the Lady's military costume, Cavendish not only links her heroine to the female kingship of Elizabeth, who donned battle gear to review the English troops at Tilbury in 1588, but she also symbolically evokes the androgynous 'body politic' of Elizabethan England and a cultural movement..." (234). Cavendish openly defies anyone who would say that her characters could not do what they do because of her allusion to Elizabeth I. Throughout the story, Cavendish also uses many instances where women who are subjugated in the *Blazing World* are given agency through the Empress' ruling. When the Empress begins questioning why no women are seen at church, the Priests and States-men respond, "[T]heir company hinders Devotion, and makes many, instead of praying to God, direct their devotion to their Mistresses" (164). This description suggests that, like many religious texts, women are hindrances to men, and men are meant to devote their time to the spiritual. The men then go on to suggest that women corrupt religious and state functions because "they are so prevalent with their Husbands and Parents, that many times by their importunate perswasions, they cause as much, nay, more mischief secretly, then if they had the management of publick affairs" (165). These men suggest that women, in essence, have abilities to control husbands and change things like religion and politics according to what they want. In this way, Cavendish offers insight into women who must find power in the private versus the public sphere. Women of the time period could not represent themselves for legal hearings. Cavendish challenges this idea through the Empress' response later in the novel. In the Empress' religious institutions, she is the preacher, an act that would have

been blasphemous back in the Empress'—and Cavendish's—world. One woman in power is showing how the inclusivity of a world can bring positive friendships. It is after this that the Empress meets the Duchess, and it is because she wishes to write a Cabbala, which is a scientific piece of literature rooted in Jewish mystical tradition. By placing herself at the helm of the religious institutions, the Empress includes women in a sphere that is otherwise kept from them beforehand. On top of that, the Empress also mirrors Elizabeth I again because Elizabeth I was the supreme governor of the Church of England while she ruled; therefore, like Elizabeth I, the Empress takes control of the religion of the Blazing World. Cavendish is also further diverging from Smith because she is showing that women are more than capable at handling power, and women are known to be able to use that power.

The power that Cavendish exercises through friendship and counsel are furthered by the introduction of the Duchess. Through the Duchess and the Empress' friendship, Cavendish imagines a reality where women can have same-sex friends without husbands being angry, and Cavendish shows how the Empress gains much power through the Duchess' help. In *A Preparative to Marriage*, Smith states that women should have no friends, much less same-sex friends when he says, "[H]ee must tender her as much as all her friends, because he hath taken her from her friends" (sig. F1r). Smith provides insight into patriarchal ideas that were rooted in ancient and medieval periods. A woman had to lose everything in life and become subordinate once married. Cavendish's portrayal of the Empress and the Duchess' friendship rejects that ideology.

While Cavendish's work rejects the patriarchal values seen 75 years before her work, the restriction of female friendship is still presented in a conduct book titled *The*

*Ladies Dictionary* (1694). The author is unknown, but it is assumed to be male. The voice within *The Ladies Dictionary* takes the approach of advising women through a question-response style instead of discussing amongst women how they as a group should act, which gives the impression that it was written by a man. This book takes on many topics including friendship and relationship advice for women. On the topic of friendship, the book states, “[H]ow shall it remain with *equal Zeal* and *Innocence*, at least *Justice*, when *one* is *Marry’d*? Foreither there must be *more* or *less tenderness* for the *Friend* than for the *Wife* or *Husband*,--- If more, ‘tis *Injustice*; for People ought not to *Marry any*, but such as are fit to make *Friends*” (sig. O3v). The book suggests that when one gets married, both the husband and the wife must make outside friendships secondary to the marriage. Moreover, the book states that it must be this way because if the friendship is not lessened, then there is no point to get married. The book implies that husband and wife must be friends in order for the marriage to be successful; therefore, friendships outside of the marriage must be lessened. While this is an important idea about marriage, the main reason *The Ladies Dictionary* is against same-sex friendships has to do with the strength of friendships. Towards the end of the answer, the book says, “The *former Friendship* must be diminish’d, as if the *Marriage* be *happy*, it *generally* perhaps *always* is. If I amn’t mistaken, the *pinch* is here, and the accordingly, *That if the Friendship between the Persons Marry’d have but the ascendant, and if that be continued with the highest degree of Zeal, any lower measure of that and Friendship may innocently remain where it was before planted*” (sig. O3v-r). According to *The Ladies Dictionary*, a woman’s friendship has the same weight as marriage. One—the friendship, naturally—must be given up in order to keep the marriage happy. In

this way, *The Ladies Dictionary* offers more of an in-depth reasoning for the ending of friendships; however, it still discourages friendships forming past marriage.

In *The Blazing World*, however, readers still see the opposite of what *The Ladies Dictionary* suggests. After the Duchess has helped the Empress to stop a war in the Empress' homeland, they return to the Blazing World where the Emperor embraces the Duchess. When the Duchess says that she must return to her Lord, the narrator says, "Hereupon both the Emperor and the Empress intreated the Duchess's Soul to stay so long with them, till she had ordered her Theatre, and made Playes and Verses for them; for they onely wanted that sort of Recreation" (248). The Emperor wishes for the Duchess to stay just as much as the Empress, and this shows that he agrees with the friendship. The Duchess and the Empress can be friends and still be by their husband's side. After the Duchess finally returns to her husband, the narrator says, "[S]he entertained her Lord (when he was pleased to hear such kind of Discourses) with Forreign Relations; but he was never displeased to hear of the Empress' kind Commendations, and of the Characters she was pleased to give of him to the Emperor" (248). The Duke and the Emperor, despite living in two different worlds, agree with their wives' friendship. They both delight in speaking with the Duchess and Empress, and they do not show any signs of jealousy over the women's friendship. The embrace of the multi-world friendship between the characters also displays the reality of what inclusion is. By embracing one another, happiness and art are at the forefront of this society. Cavendish shows readers that inclusion ultimately leads to healthy marriages built on equality.

The marriage that *The Ladies Dictionary* depicts ultimately reflects back to *A Preparative to Marriage*. When speaking about marriages and infidelity, *The Ladies Dictionary* says,

Without this bond of Perfectness, all will be loose, uneasie, and unpleasing; yea, the Laws and Commands of God, who by his wise Providence ordered the Match, will become tedious and irksom. But where this *Conjugal Love* is consequent upon the foregoing *Christian Love*, there all will become easie. This is the very life of Friendship; and where it resides in power, no diligence will be wanting to facilitate all other conjugal Duties. For never-failing *Charity*, especially in this *Relation*, will enable the good Wife to *bear all things, to believe all things*. (sig. L1r)

*The Ladies Dictionary* says that men will inevitably cheat, but women are meant to stay constant. In another section of the conduct book, it states, "It may be granted, Men, yea, Husbands, are generally more prone to Incontinency... *Men can have Commerce no with vertue*: and therefore are concern'd to be watchful and moderate, especially considering what the great *Philosopher* hath said, *That of all the desires of the body, Men are apt to be faulty this way*... It much concerns the *Christian Wife*, to give check to any suggestion, much more to any parley which is in a tendency to violate her *Matrimonial Contract*" (sig. L1r). In the eyes of this book, the "friendship" between the husband and wife, although companionate, relies upon the likes of Christianity in order to succeed. This inevitably reflects back on *A Preparative to Marriage* due to the patriarchal setting between the husband and wife due to the unequal standards. Although *The Blazing World* does not have any cases where the husbands are shown to be committing adultery, in the scenes where

the two do interact, there is no sense that marriages are in jeopardy. Even in the first scene that they meet, the Emperor “conceived her to be some Goddess, and offered to worship her” (162). By perceiving the Lady—later titled Empress—as a Goddess, the Emperor effectively places her above him in all regards. The fact that the Emperor does not view himself above the Empress means that he does not believe he has the power in order to commit infidelity in such a casual manner. Cavendish therefore reimagines a relationship that begins with a reversal to the hierarchal relationship. Cavendish furthers this reversal when the Empress is given absolute control of the world and does not need the Emperor to give the ultimate approval for anything she wishes to do.

Cavendish’s portrayal of a different type of marriage enables readers to see a positive portrayal of powerful women. Her utopian society entails a woman having absolute control over a world, an eventual reversal of the period-typical hierarchal marriage between the Empress and the Emperor, and a friendship between two women that empowers the novel in a way that defies those popular ideas. Moreover, Cavendish is showing readers that women of the time period did not merely listen to the men who wrote conduct books; women found their power with one another and maintained fairly happy marriages.

### **Cavendish and Real Life**

*The Ladies Dictionary* and *A Preparative to Marriage* both were published several decades from *The Blazing World*; therefore, it is important to look at a conduct book that was published closer to Cavendish’s own. One conduct book was actually written by a woman—Hannah Woolley—and published against her wishes in 1673. In her book, *The Gentlewoman’s Companion*, Woolley focuses on many different areas for women. An

interesting note is how focused Woolley mentions “friends” throughout her book. When she is talking about the different matters and who needs aid, Woolley always mentions “friends” while naming things like family and neighbors. Instead of focusing on ways that women must be subjugated while married, Woolley’s book focuses on ways women can break out from the subjugation that male-written conduct books say. As Woolley’s book suggests, friendship is something that did occur for the time period, even if it was against the male writers’ suggestions.

Woolley’s book also proves that women sought after things like intelligence. In her book, she says, “But that which most of all increast my knowledg, was my daily reading to my Lady, Poems of all sorts, and Plays, teaching me as I read, where to place my accents, how to arise and fall my voice, where lay the emphasis of the expression” (sig. B7r). Woolley emphasizes the importance of education and sharing that education throughout her book. Woolley also suggests that women during the time period worked to grow their knowledge together. It is easy to see that in *The Blazing World*. The Empress searches out knowledge in different areas. When the Empress decides to begin searching for answers to her scientific questions, she does so because “each followed such a profession as was most proper for the nature of their species, which the Empress encouraged them in, especially those that had applied themselves to the study of several Arts and Sciences; for they were as ingenious and witty in the invention of profitable and useful Arts, as we are in this world, nay, more; and to that end she erected Schools, and founded several Societies” (163). She begins this because she sees the potential in her people. This is also building a society of scholars with her, a woman, at the helm. The Empress will not make her societies exclusive; her societies will include all of the species of her world. She instructs the different

creatures to research areas such as religion and science, and she wishes to find answers to questions such as whether the sun is hot. Eventually, the Empress decides she must write a Cabbala for the Blazing World and enlists the help of a spirit. Although she suggests spirits such as Galileo, Des Cartes, Hobbes, and others, the Spirit suggests the Duchess of Newcastle. Once brought to this realm, the two begin conversing over the best type of Cabbala to write. This discussion ends with the Duchess suggesting, “If your Majesty were resolved to make a Cabbala, I would advise you, rather to make a Poetical or Romancical Cabbala, wherein you can use Metaphors, Allegories, Similitudes, &c. and interpret them as you please” (210). The Empress thanks her for her help and makes the Duchess her “favorite” (210). The two women show how well learned they are. The two decide for themselves through an intelligent conversation how to write this work. Instead of relying on a man to guide them, the two come to this conclusion together as two women. Like Woolley, Cavendish’s characters reflect a mutual growth for knowledge in a society that shows inclusiveness and an embrace of friendship.

Woolley’s depiction of everyday women is also important when one looks back at Cavendish’s own life. Scott-Baumann writes about Cavendish’s developing writing style through her works and revisions: “Margaret Cavendish must be viewed as a shrewd self-editor, pragmatically involved in the publishing process, and as an author who admitted changes in her thinking, and was responsive to intellectual climate as well as to hostile reception” (80). Scott-Baumann discusses Cavendish’s involvement in the publishing process throughout her career, and it becomes possible to look to Cavendish’s companionship with the printer of *The Blazing World*. Scott-Baumann writes about early publications that had printing notes from Cavendish printed with the rest of the



publication. She says, “[I]n *Natures Pictures* (1656), for example, instructions for the printers have been incorporated into the text. The phrases ‘This is to come after the Matrimonial agreement’, and ‘This is to be placed next my Tale of the Philosopher, which my Lord writ’ were accidentally printed” (62). This means that Cavendish, even early in her career, was involved in placing her works together, and she attempted to work with the printers chosen to print her works. The publication of *Natures Pictures* was printed by Thomas Warren—although The Digital Cavendish Project questions whether Warren printed it (Kroetsch). Therefore, it also becomes apparent that Cavendish’s companionship with other printers like the printer for *The Blazing World* had to happen.

The printing industry itself was experiencing changes despite what male voices depict. The appendix for *A Biographical Dictionary of English Women Writers 1580-1720* reveals the close bond between writer and printer. For example in the illegal pamphlet trade, one woman, Martha Simmonds, published pamphlets that supported opposite beliefs from that of her husband. When talking about the relationship between the illegal pamphleteers and their publishers, the appendix states, “What becomes apparent... is the existence of networks of common interest and acquaintance within particular (often sectarian) groups” (290). Friendship networks, seen in Woolley’s work and the illegal pamphlet trade, show how women in the workforce of the 17<sup>th</sup> century worked. Trust and friendship were between printer and writers, especially if they were rejected by mainstream society. Thus, it is likely that Cavendish had developed a friendship with the printer of *The Blazing World*.

The title page of Cavendish’s *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* credits a printer named A. Maxwell, or Anne Maxwell. The Digital Cavendish Project lists Anne

Maxwell as a widow; she presumably received her husband's flourishing business upon his death in 1665. Anne Maxwell was a very successful printer, and she was listed as a "master printer" in London (Kroetsch). What is also important about Anne Maxwell is the companionship she must have had with Margaret Cavendish. In *The Blazing World*, the Duchess, a fictional imagination of Cavendish, is described by the Spirit as "not one of the most learned, eloquent, witty and ingenious, yet is she a plain and rational Writer, for the principle of her Writings, is Sense and Reason, and she will without question, be ready to do you all the service she can" (208). The description of the Duchess matches with ways Cavendish would word her prefaces; Cavendish embraced the fact that she became educated in the sciences and other typically male-driven fields later in life, and she spent a large majority of her prefaces explaining ideas to readers to ensure readers understood for the rest of the works. When the Spirit says that the Duchess is "ready to do you all the service she can," the spirit is stating that the Duchess, and Cavendish, is completely devoted when it comes to friendships. As a writer, Cavendish went through several printers before beginning to print with Anne Maxwell in 1666. In Cavendish's earlier works, she was also known to complain about mistakes printers made with her works in the "To the Readers." Scott-Baumann writes that in a copy of *Poems and Fancies* (1653), Cavendish handwrote a letter that said, "[R]eader let me intreat you to consider only the fancyes in this my book of poems and not the languesh numbers nor rimes nor fals printing" (qtd. in Scott-Baumann 62). However, that seems to not happen with Maxwell; not only does Cavendish resist complaining about Maxwell's work, but Cavendish also continues to print and reprint previous works with her until her death.

The companionship that possibly existed between Cavendish and Maxwell does agree with Woolley's conduct book, who writes about the knowledge she gained working as a governess and later as lady of the house. Through the knowledge Woolley gained, she writes:

In short time I be came skilful, and stayed enough to order an house, and all Offices belonging to it; and gained so great an esteem among the Nobility and Gentry of two Counties, that I was necessitated to yield to the importunity of one I dearly lov'd, that I might free my self from the tedious caresses of a many more. In the time I was a Wife, I had frequent occasions to make use of all, or most of my aforenamed qualities; and what I exercised not within my own roof, I used among my neighbours, friends, and acquaintants. (sig. B6r-v)

Woolley admits that the knowledge she acquired was used to help friends. Through what little is known about Cavendish's companionship with Maxwell, one can assume the same happened. While Maxwell knew printing and had the technology for it, Cavendish was developing her own writing style, and the companionship between them had to influence her work.

Cavendish's companionship with Maxwell presents wider possibilities for the friendships in *The Blazing World*. While it could be assumed that Cavendish was merely attempting to employ ideas for a society she wished to live in, the relationship in real life provides the possibility that Cavendish was actually writing about friendship from the perspective of reality. The Duchess, after all, is a mirror of Cavendish, so the depiction of her friendship with the Empress in the novel must be looked at with the idea that it reflects

back on Cavendish herself. The friendship between the Empress and the Duchess does not simply become figments of Cavendish's fantasy, but it adds to a dialogue that presents women as more than the submissive ideal of male writers. This friendship shows that women, no matter the circumstance, could join together. This friendship shows that women are powerful together, and male voices cannot stop their growth.

### **Conclusions**

Margaret Cavendish was truly a visionary for her time period. As a proponent of the beginning of the Enlightenment, Cavendish uniquely approached the publication of *The Blazing World* in a way that only she could succeed. Her utopia is successful because women exercised power. By defying the loosely based rules of the utopian genre, Cavendish invites her readers and contemporary scholars to read about a world that exemplifies the power that women find in friendships. Moreover, Cavendish's focus on the friendship shows that women in 17<sup>th</sup> century England argued against the male voices and found ways to power despite the patriarchal society they lived in. By writing herself into the story, Cavendish invites readers to take a closer look at her own life. Therefore, Cavendish's own life reflects the story by her close work in the printing industry. As a woman with considerable wealth, Cavendish's devotion to Maxwell's printing further shows that women took their own lives in their hands and worked together against the barriers set in front of them by men.

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